Managing artifacts: Empreza Di'ak's commodity production practices in Atauro, Timor-Leste[1]

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Pedagogic practices domesticating the production, circulation and consumption of goods and artifacts in order to turn them into commodities have been a leading avenue of political action for strengthening the economy of and for the market in Timor-Leste. National and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious institutions, foreign cooperation agencies, and state agents have acted in concert – intentionally or otherwise – towards channeling and managing multiple resources into local production groups. Empreza Di'ak (ED, Good Enterprise), a national NGO operating in Atauro and elsewhere in Timor-Leste, has been a leading agent in this field of political action.[4]

This chapter approaches ED's work with groups from the Makili *suku*,[5] which carve Atauro statues, and from the village of

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5. *Suku* is a state administrative unit consisting of several hamlets or *aldeia*.

Arlo, which make *sanan rai* or pottery.[6] Our discussion of how ED has related to certain sections of the population in each of these localities is driven by the following questions: how are locally produced artifacts introduced into the market? What does it mean to grant these artifacts 'market access' in each case? Have these objects changed in the process, and how? What is the historical and cultural locus of these objects in each community? Inspired by these core questions, we seek to demonstrate how noneconomic variables function as key mediators in the process whereby certain artifacts are turned into commodities.

Moreover, we take a comparative look at some of the devices, conditionings, foundations and expectations that support the NGO's pedagogic dynamics as it interacts with crafters and their artifacts. We argue that the local conditions in which such objects are produced, and their history and social location in each community (stemming, in part, from their differential adherence to Christianity), impose constraints on how ED has managed the artifacts and therefore organized its own interventions, in each of these places. We also suggest that managerial practices, such as NGO community visits, the selection, classification and codification of objects, the guaranteed purchase of local products, and work with production groups, are all fundamental technologies of governance for turning certain objects into commodities.[7] According to Silva (2017, 203), these technologies seem to involve an economic pedagogy, "a device for the diffusion and domestication of resource production, circulation and consumption practices intended for market production and exchange."

In this chapter we understand commodity in Marx's terms (1982), that is, as an artifact containing both use and exchange values. The artifact's market destination and, therefore, alienability are key biographic landmarks.[8] Both Kopytoff (2008, 94) and Tsing (2013)

6. This Tetum term means earth (*rai*) pot/pan (*sanan*).

7. Incentive for commodity production is one of the ways of inducing community participation in an economy of and for the market. This point is considered in our final remarks.

8. Surplus value – in Marxist economics is when those who own the means of production pay the workers less than the value their labor has contributed to the commodity, appropriating the difference or profit – is an essential feature of

have shown, however, that many artifacts are not born as commodities, but incorporate such an identity through a series of mediations. For Kopytoff (2008), the commodity is "... a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, classified and reclassified in terms of culturally constructed categories." Using this perspective, the discussion approaches one chapter in the biography of certain artifacts, that which underscores some of the mediations through which they become commodities. As Tsing (2013) showed in her analysis of the commodification of mushrooms, such mediations are repeatedly deployed for different objects all over the world, despite the legal and moral apparatuses which sustain a society of and for the market.

This discussion is also inspired by the epistemology put forth by Gibson and Graham (1996) in their analysis of economic complexes exposed to the expansion of capitalism. They propose a counter-ontological perspective for approaching the growth of market societies and capitalism itself (Silva 2018). It is based on the assumption that the entanglement of populations and territories in market societies is conditioned by economic arrangements that were in place before the latter's arrival. This means that we are always dealing with markets in the plural, which are differently configured according to context and respond to particular historical conditions.

Moreover, Gibson and Graham (1996) draw attention to the case of collectives that are nominally industrialized and modern, where social reproduction involves assembling multiple regimes of production, distribution and consumption which cannot be fully reduced to the unified picture of an all-embracing capitalist system. Against this background, this chapter reveals some of the mediations and differences through which market-oriented production is expanding in contemporary Timor-Leste.

There are two sets of data analyzed in this chapter. The first is from fieldwork in the administrative post of Atauro, between August and November of 2017, focusing on ED's organization and work with local artisans, as well as its relations with other market

capitalism as a production system, as well as of market societies. It is possible however to have market societies without generalized capitalist production.

actors and spaces operating on the island. The second is the literature review on the expansion and diffusion of projects for building a market society, and of capitalist assumptions and foundations. Our primary focus was on studies that regard the economic dimension as embedded (Polanyi 2000) in social organization and the reproduction of persons, in biological and social terms.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first presents Empreza Di'ak's portfolio that prioritizes directing certain artifacts to the market. The discussion views these practices from a broader perspective which includes other actors. The second section describes part of the NGO's structure in Atauro, and some of the managerial devices it deploys to manage objects in Makili and Arlo. We then discuss specific aspects of its practice in each case. The fourth section seeks to understand the factors underlying different negotiation strategies with each collective. This section also considers some sociological particularities framing the adherence of Maliki residents to Catholic Christianity and of Arlo residents to Pentecostal Christianity. The final remarks draw together the analytical threads dispersed throughout the chapter, bringing them to bear on a wider understanding of how market expansion has occurred in Atauro, Timor-Leste.

First, some preliminary information about Atauro is in order. The island has around nine thousand inhabitants, distributed across five sukus: Beloi, Bikeli, Makadade, Makili and Villa Maumeta. In contrast with the rest of the country, the Protestant denomination, Assemblies of God, is highly popular among the islanders, while the Catholic faith has prevailed only in Makili, Makadade and Villa Maumeta. According to Bicca (2011), adherence to Catholicism is higher in Makili, where 81% of its residents declare themselves Catholics. Beloi, where the ED headquarters are located, and Villa Maumeta have the best infrastructure, ease of access and highest prevalence of tourism. Atauro is one of the country's main tourist destinations,[9] and is part of the Social Market Economy Special Zone (Zona Especial de

9. Further information on the government's development plan is available at http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?cat=39 . Last accessed July 15, 2018.

Economia Social de Mercado, ZEESM).[10] Launched in 2015, the tenth Master Plan for the Territory of Atauro Island (Plano de Ordenamento do Território da Ilha de Ataúro, POT) accords tourism a special place.

Empowerment comes with the market

One of ED's goals is to transform what it calls 'traditional' or 'tradition' – that is, knowledge involved in the production of *kultura* goods and artifacts – into a livelihood, by exchanging them for money through specific market channels.[11]

In general, these artifacts' local production histories hark back to the "time of the grandparents",[12] and their uses have been multiple.[13] The objects are primarily directed to the NGO's shops in Atauro and Dili, whose clients are mostly tourists. The ED director stated "we do not buy from the community because we have the shop. We have the shop because we buy from the community".[14]

Incentives for circulating these artifacts in the market are part of ED's strategy for economically empowering communities. ED argues that by exchanging locally produced commodities for money in the market, communities – especially women – can boost their autonomy and power. From the organization's perspective, the supposed vulnerability of East Timorese, especially women, is the outcome of an "underdeveloped" market economy. This is the

10. ZEESM's goal is to "establish special, socially-oriented trading zones in order to foster the growth of a social market economy, which may become a model for Timor-Leste". Available at https://www.zeesm.tl/pt/visao-e-missao/ Last accessed July 15, 2018.

11. In this chapter, *kultura* denotes a heterogeneous set of practices and representations based on local knowledge in Timor-Leste. It is an emic, native category, mobilized by multiple actors in order to justify governance interventions or to demarcate local specificities from Euro-American ways of organizing and thinking experience. For an analysis of the genealogy and political uses of the category in postcolonial Timor-Leste, see Silva, 2014.

12. Our interlocutors used expressions such as 'time of the grandparents', *tempu uluk* (Tetun for long ago) to stress that knowledge involved in the production of certain artifacts is immemorial/ancestral and developed outside the school system.

13. A sentence on the NGO's website is representative of its *modus operandi*: "Help turn traditions into livehoods and empower lives". http://empreza-diak.com

14. Field diary entry, from an interview with Maria Amado in November 2017.

rationale behind the pedagogic practices targeting the communities' productive organization.

ED's strategy is by no means exceptional. It is part of broader governance practices that have been fostered by multiple actors with the aim of building a national economy. An example of this trend was a speech by the country's then prime minister, Mari Alkatiri, addressing local groups, NGOs and women's collectives, among which was Empreza Di'ak. At the event "Hasae Vizibilidade no Konsensia Publika Konaba Kontrobuisaun Feto iha Produsaun Agri*kultura*, Nutrisaun no Asesu ba Merkadu" (Increase the Visibility and Public Consensus for Women's Contribution in Agricultural Production, Nutrition and Market Access), held on December 15, 2017, Alkatiri suggested a direct correlation between nation-building and the "switch to a market-oriented mentality". He presented the market as the chief locomotive for the country's development, which would require the rearrangement of local production practices. In these and other discourses, the so-called *subsistence economy*[15] was pictured as non-productive and its replacement with a market economy was presented as the only way to improve the people's well-being.[16]

15. This chapter speaks of *subsistence economy* as an emic category, despite anthropology's conceptual critique of how Western perspectives commonly understand it (Sahlins 1972; Gibson et al. 2018).

16. For Polanyi (2000), the chief driver of a market economy is the search for profit. Turning land, labor and money into commodities was a fundamental precondition for the formation and expansion of market societies in Western Europe. The transformation of profit as the main purpose of economic activities led to 'disembedding' the economy from earlier modes of social reproduction, constructing it as a supposedly autonomous sphere of social action.

Photo 1: Entrance of Sentru Atauro Di'ak

To buy is to negotiate: Empreza Di'ak with production groups

This section discusses common features underlying the ED practices in both Arlo and Makili. Founded in 2010 by a Portuguese couple, Ariana and Filipe, the NGO operates across Timor-Leste; however, its presence in Atauro is unique. ED has a special office on this island, called *Sentru Ataúro Di'ak* (Ataúro's Good Centre).[17] It coordinates the organization's activities on the island and enjoys some level of decision-making autonomy. It also promotes free English lessons, computer training and other courses; manages a community vegetable garden and a duck incubator; and provides accommodation for the NGO members and volunteers, who come to work on the island.

A pillar of ED's pedagogic practices involves working with production groups. It is a tactic of governance also employed by many other organizations and is justified, firstly, so that resources are more efficiently allocated; and secondly, so that communities can learn to work together and deal with internal differences. From

17. Locally, the place is called only as *Sentru*.

our perspective, to take production groups as the object of political and pedagogic action is also a way of furthering the latter's quantitative scope. Moreover, to involve a larger sample of actors may help achieve a collective restructuring of multiple modes of relation and practice.

Each suku within ED's scope has a focal point, a member of the group responsible for mediating communication and exchanges between the collective and the NGO. Every Saturday, these individuals go to ED's Sentru in Beloi to report on the work done and on possible needs and/or difficulties. The focal person maintains the flow of communication between production groups and ED, making sure that information is relayed to all the local groups without the need for NGO staff to travel back and forth. In exchange, the organization offers these focal points one 23 kg bag of rice, coffee, sugar, cash for purchasing cell phone credits and travel expenses. Altogether, these resources add up to around 48 US dollars for each focal point monthly.

One of the Sentru's main lines of action is to purchase objects from production groups in order to sell them in stores in Beloi and Díli. The team visits the collectives once a month, on specific days of the week. Depending on travel conditions, the ED team may arrive on foot, by boat, tuk-tuk[18] or in a truck. Access is undermined by the poor road infrastructure leading to the villages. Examples of the artifacts the NGO purchases are statues, ceramics, baskets and other objects woven from *akadiro* (lontar palm) leaves, wooden handicrafts, soap, jewelry, coffee and books. Moreover, the NGO also provides training and tutoring for communities in order to help develop their handicrafts.

In each place the visit to the community happens on a different week day. In Makili, it takes place on Thursday, market day, when families from different Atauro sukus go to the village of Fatulela. The NGO meets with each group in their own production and selling space. In Arlo, the ED visits occur on Tuesday, not coinciding with market day, because the market takes place in another village.

18. Local transport consists of a three-wheeled motor vehicle for carrying passengers.

Every month the NGO spends around 500 US dollars purchasing artifacts produced in Atauro. This amount does not include staff transportation and food costs. Considering that World Bank statistics in 2014 found 30.3% of Timorese lived on less than $1.90 per capita, and that the circulation of cash in Atauro is very restricted, the injection of 500 US dollars into the local economy is likely to have a significant impact on the dynamics of production and reproduction of persons and things on the island.

The selection of objects ED purchases and sells in its shops is an important part of pedagogic practices for local production groups. This selection follows four main criteria: 1) The objects' esthetic appearance, that is, how close they are to potential consumers' standards of beauty (usually foreigners, tourists and members of the country's urban elites); 2) The quality of the final product, taking into account the shop customers' expectations; 3) The number of each commodity required, based on how quickly they are sold in the Beloi shop; and 4) The budget available during each visit to production groups for purchasing items.

Most items are manufactured with the intention of becoming commodities. However, this outcome is only possible if ED selects them for the shops. Once these objects are selected, taken from the villages and exchanged for money, artisans relinquish ownership over them: they become alienable.

The artifacts' ontological transition towards becoming commodities is mediated by the agency of an Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet is based on a system for classifying the artifacts, coding them according to type, size, origin, model and price. For each variable, specific coding standards generate a composite code whose function is to indicate the price paid to producers. Below are two instances of how this classificatory system is applied to statues and ceramics:

Figure 1 – Examples of commodity classification

MKL.06.051
MKL: Makili origin
06: category statue
05: double statue model (alligator, an imitation of Christ the King, a couple, etc.)
1: size (small, medium, large, etc.)

ARL.10.010
ARL: Arlo origin
10: category sanan rai
01: model sanan rai

Two values are associated with each code: their purchase price in the village and their sale price in the store. The spreadsheet also informs NGO members how many of each item are still available in the stores. Thus, for instance, if the shops have a significant quantity of one item in stock, the purchase of similar objects has to wait until the next visit.

The price paid for the artifacts is based on previous negotiations between ED and the producers. When the producer group introduces innovations ED negotiates new prices.

These codes identify the artifacts during their trajectory through Empreza Di'ak. The NGO also provides receipts and written accounts of all its purchases to individuals or producer groups. These receipts describe each product according to the codes included in the spreadsheet. The NGO's stores in Beloi and Dili make use of the same codes for keeping track of the artifacts as they come in and go out.

Photo 2: Codified commodity at Empreza Di'ak's shop

In her ethnography of the biography of matsutake mushrooms, Tsing (2013) identifies critical events demarcating their ontological transition from gift (shaped by the commons)[19] to commodity, and then from commodity back to gift.[20] The author argues that the successive procedures for selecting and classifying matsutake are essential for their transformation into commodities. Procedures carried out by individuals who have no appreciation or affective attachment to the mushrooms, and their extraction from the original context, enable the circulation of these goods exclusively as commodities during a specific and short period of

19. By commons we mean resources and knowledge produced and owed collectively.

20. Roughly speaking, the gift-like character of certain objects and services may relate to the following: 1. celebrating the object's attachment to whoever produced it or put it into circulation (be it individual or collective subjects); 2. exchanging such objects and services in order to support the construction or reproduction of relations outside the domain of exchange. Traffic in objects and services across different exchange regimes affect their ontological condition, enabling the transformation of gifts into commodities and vice versa. The limits of this chapter do not allow a thorough discussion of the vast anthropological literature dealing with the gift-like character of certain objects and services. For this discussion, see Silva (2017).

their biographies. Inspired by Bruno Latour, Tsing suggests that the selections and classifications to which matsutake are subjected operate as a kind of purification, which extracts from them any information attaching it to particular persons, places or histories.

The Empreza Di'ak's managerial procedures based on classification and subsequent codification of artifacts also have the effect of detaching the latter from those involved in their production, even if reference to their geographical origins is maintained as they are taken to the stores. Once ED selects, codifies and purchases the objects, their potential deployment as gifts is suspended, even if it remains possible for them to be subsequently appropriated for producing and reproducing obligations and relationships, including of a ritual kind. In any case, these codification procedures introduce anonymity and circumscribe the objects' existence exclusively as commodities, at least for a period of time. For ED, they exist as a code made up of letters and numbers.

The following sections address particular pedagogic practices employed by ED in Makili and Arlo. The data were collected through participation in the NGO's visits to local production groups. In all such visits, we were accompanied by ED staff members Eduarda, Martiniana and Sherry, to whom we are deeply grateful.[21]

Making commodities in Makili

Makili is primarily a Catholic community, locally recognized as populated mostly by fishers and sculptors. Forced displacement by the Indonesian state during the occupation drove the population to coastal areas, where the soil is not appropriate for agriculture and fresh water is scarce (Bicca 2011). People still keep gardens in the mountains and agricultural production is almost entirely directed to domestic consumption. Fishing, handicrafts, pension for those over 60 and work with the civil service are the main avenues for accessing money.

21. The first two were paid Timorese staff, while the latter was a Peace Corps volunteer and had been working with the NGO for two years. The kind of involvement these interlocutors had with production groups was quite similar.

Community organization for producing commodities has been championed by two priests, Fathers Pierlugi Fornasie and Francesco Moser,[22] respectively known by locals as Fathers Luis and Chico. Since 2005, they have been encouraging and supporting the creation of production groups for enabling local access to financial resources. An example of this effort is the cooperative Bonecas de Ataúro (Atauro Dolls), which has around 60 women who make dolls, bags and other accessories. The international recognition gained by this cooperative and its products led others in the community to view commodity production optimistically.[23]

In Makili, ED works with two production groups: *Estatua Manukokorek* (Crowing Rooster Statue), consisting of men who carve artifacts at home; and *Haburas Homan* (Prosperous Weaving), mostly women who produce items woven from akadiro (lontar palm) leaves.[24] ED promoted the formation of the first group, and offered it training on business creation and management. The second group existed before the NGO arrived in Makili and, according to their leader Virginia Soares, had been originally encouraged by Timorese civil servants beginning in 2014.

Haburas Homan runs a production workshop located next to the group leader's house. There, group members get together to weave artifacts and sell them to ED. For this reason, the space is also known as the shop. When ED visits the community, the sculptors take their statues to the shop to sell them to the NGO. Although at the time we did fieldwork there were other production groups operating in Makili, ED worked only with those two.

22. By the time we wrote this article, Father Chico had left Atauro. He passed away on December 25, 2018.

23. Turnover rates remained high and women constantly missed working days in the cooperative. Some of our field interlocutors suggested that these absences were mostly due to two reasons: an overload of household chores and, in some cases, domestic violence.

24. At the time, this group comprised four women and two of their husbands. Male involvement was considered very important for the group. Mário, husband of the group's leader and focal point in Makili, claimed the group was only able to maintain itself because the women did not have to pay for the akadiro leaves. He and Manuel, the second husband, climbed the tall palms to cut the leaves. During fieldwork we noticed that this was indeed a male activity.

We accompanied a typical visit to Makili and observed the ED staff select, classify and pay for the products. Tetum was the language of transaction between the groups and the NGO staff, while the producers talked among themselves in their native language, *Hresuk*. The visit began with questions about labor practices and difficulties encountered during the production process. There was also time for questions from members of the production groups.

The focus of the visit was the selection of products for purchase, a slow process, given the large number of objects displayed for the ED staff. Purchasing happened on an individual basis, thus involving individual and nominal receipts. For members of the Estatua Manukokorek group, the cash gained through sales went directly to each artisan, with no mediation of collective management. For the Haburas Homan, payment involved only one receipt, and the group's leader was in charge of managing the allocation of cash exchanged for the products.[25]

Relations between ED and the production group, Estatua Manukokorek, had an important peculiarity: in the case of new artifacts, it is not ED that established the price. Sculptors presented their products to the NGO with prices already set. Staff decided whether the price requested matched the price set for a similar kind of artifact in their spreadsheet, and whether there were sufficient resources for purchasing all the objects necessary for replenishing their stocks. Whenever there was a significant gap between the price a craftsman's price and the price the NGO was willing to pay, negotiation may ensue. On other occasions, staff did not question the price set for the artifact, recognizing its worth even if the value was beyond the NGO's purchasing capacity for that particular visit.

Although in the past the NGO promoted actions for developing and adapting the products to their intended market, during our time in the field, innovations in the artifacts were introduced by the producers themselves. Our observations of such work in this suku indicated that the governance technologies ED

25. We asked NGO staff about the dynamics of individual payments, as they claimed to work only with groups. They said although they paid each craftsman individually, they were still part of a group.

applied to artifacts and their producers were limited to selection and insertion of data into spreadsheets, and other managerial documentation, as well as to the production of receipts and attendance registers.

ED staff label and price the commodities directly in the store, with no a posteriori selection. The final consumer price is set by adding between 7 and 83% of value to the price originally paid to the producer.

Last, but not least, the fact that Makili residents have direct access to the sea implies that they are able to journey regularly to the country's capital city, Dili, and therefore be involved in market exchange regime often.

Photo 3: Women weave while ED staff assess the products

The making of commodities in Arlo

In Arlo ED's work with the *Hakusara Group* (Increase ceramic production knowledge) is very different to its relations with the Makili production groups. The group operating in this village was itself a result of the NGO's work. In 2014, ED met two women who knew how to produce sanan rai, a pottery craft that had supposedly died out in the community. The organization then began an intensive effort towards rescuing and reviving this local knowledge. The ED reports include multiple initiatives carried out in order to salvage and value local pottery knowledge, as well as recommendations for modifying products, the production process and cost accounting.

Other key mediators in this process were archaeologists and social scientists working in the region, funded by the French organization *Institut du Recherche pour le Devéloppement* (IRD, Institute of Research for Development) with support from the Timorese state. In 2014 the archaeologist Jean-Christophe Galipaud published a study of sanan rai production across Timor-Leste with the then Secretariat of Arts and Culture. Titled, *Sanan Rai: Um patrimônio em extinção em Timor-Leste* (Sanan rai: A vanishing heritage in Timor-Leste), the book researched the history of such artifacts in several Timorese municipalities. In the case of Arlo, it remarked on the need for the revitalization and sharing of this knowledge, which was then concentrated in the hands of two elderly women, Katharina and Joana.

The Hakusara production group is exclusively women, usually married with children. Sanan rai production occurs in groups, every Tuesday, on a land parcel belonging to the group leader, Lita. During the rainy season, the pottery production declines, as the process requires a lot of sun, as well as dry leaves and wood for the final clay firing.

During all of our visits to Arlo with ED staff, significant time was spent observing the production process, drinking coffee and interacting not just with the artifacts but with the women themselves. The women provided us with breakfast, lunch (usually fish caught by one of the group members) and coconuts collected by their husbands. In order to increase the circulation of cash in the

village, the NGO paid ten US dollars for the food provided to its members, regardless of the amount of individuals participating in the visit. During these moments of sociality that preceded the task of classifying, coding and purchasing, some ED members occasionally acted as apprentices in pottery production.[26]

On these occasions, the team took the opportunity to follow up on other community projects. Besides sanan rai, they also purchased artifacts woven from akadiro leaves similar to those acquired in Makili, as well as individually produced bamboo handicrafts such as straws and cups. The bamboo artifacts, in contrast to the sanan rai, were made mostly by the husbands of some of the group's women and required the use of machines for the finishing polish. The transformation of woven items and bamboo handicraft into commodities was also an effect of the NGO's presence in the village.[27]

Although some of the objects ED classified and purchased in Arlo were made by men, the women negotiated the sales and receipts also had their names on them.

The ED staff conducted the Arlo meeting differently to that in Makili. Before purchasing the artifacts, team members talked extensively, meticulously and carefully to members of the Hakusara production group about the process. Given that salvaging the production of sanan rai and other artifacts was a recent effort, there seemed to be a need for further explanation about why certain pots would draw more interest from customers than others.

ED staff extended the spreadsheet guiding the classification, coding and pricing of artifacts based on negotiations between the NGO and production groups. However in Arlo, the ED also purchased, for a lower price, items that were not the usual quality

26. Since the ED team spoke *Rasua*, the language prevalent in Beloi, the group meetings were primarily in this language. Tetum was spoken only occasionally and by a few women.

27. Sherry recounted that early in the project they asked women whether they had other kinds of artifacts to sell during the rainy season, when sanan rai production was difficult. The NGO suggested that the akadiro woven objects the women used in everyday chores could be sold. Since then, these artifacts have also been commoditized.

required for the tourism market.[28] In this case, the value was not based on the spreadsheet, but was established by ED staff during the visit.

During their interactions with production groups in Arlo, ED members shared knowledge about the tastes and preferences of potential consumers to justify the cash value offered for each product and to prompt improvements in production standards. The visits also identified problems stemming from molding and burning processes which had negative impacts on the commodities' final aesthetics and, as a consequence, on sales to consumers. In Arlo, in contrast with Makili, ED staff felt it was necessary to encourage the continuation of production, regardless of whether or not all the objects were of sufficient standard for sale, and that the NGO would not stop purchasing sanan rai to enable further development in commodity quality.

Based on analyses of reports and discussions with ED members, it became clear that, besides monthly meetings, guaranteed purchase of products, including those which did not show sufficient quality, was a key strategy for salvaging and maintaining local pottery knowledge: "Even if we lose money, we continue to buy so that they will continue to learn and improve", said the Sentru coordinator, José Marques.

During our time in the field, we also found that Empreza Di'ak would interfere more intensively in the management of artifact design in Arlo than in Makili. In Arlo, team members consistently suggested new pottery models to the women, such as candle holders and ashtrays, while also respecting the dynamics of local knowledge reproduction.

Finally, it should be remarked that Arlo residents are significantly more isolated from Dili and the national market than those in Makili. In Arlo, even cell phone reception was often difficult.

28. The NGO does not purchase all items during its visits. Sherry mentioned that women questioned them about what to do with the unsold pots, as they had no use locally.

Photo 4: Sanan rai on display at Empreza Di'ak's shop

If it is for the market, why does it have to be different?

The characteristics and limitations of pedagogical interventions discussed here are best understood in light of how locals relate to the artifacts they produce, and the use value they attribute to them. This section suggests that the chapter in the biography of certain statues from Makili and the sanan rai from Arlo considered here has been conditioned by a long-term, complex historical process. In this process, objects were incorporated into differential trajectories involving conversion to Christianity and particular dynamics of contact with the market regime, among other factors. The elements that make up this longstanding historical plot may help make sense of how ED has managed artifacts in response to local agency.

During fieldwork with sculptors in Makili, ED staff emphasized the 'original' method for finishing statues as something positive, in contrast to modern painting techniques. The

so-called smoking process,[29] especially for making a style of statue called the couple, was frequently applied to justify a higher price for these items when compared with painted ones. The smoking technique was considered to be ancestral knowledge and heritage, whose reproduction ensures that statues and their producers continue to exist to this day. People consider statues as artifacts bestowed by the ancestors, therefore promoting the mystical connection and protection with fundamental impacts on the reproduction of community life.

In this context, the Catholic Church's presence in the community helps explain the continuity of this craft, and the statues' religious and mystical value. As Keane (2007) has suggested – and, for Portuguese Timor, Fernandes (2014) and others – some conversion practices championed by the Catholic Church in the region in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council beginning in 1962 followed a strategy of designating local institutions as mediators for introducing Christian ideas. Thus, the Church's conversion technologies and devices were not premised on abandoning local knowledge and practices, even if we recognize disjunctions between discourse and practices, as well as variations in space and time (Rosa 2017).

The higher prevalence of Catholic Christianity in Makili, when compared with other regions of Atauro, may help us understand how traditional knowledge and the statues' mystical value were maintained. This background played a role in modulating specific interventions by governance agents, such as ED, which have sought to promote commodity production in the country.

The knowledge on which statue carving is based was considered to be sacred and immemorial. Its reproduction was therefore highly valued and changes in the production process were regarded as a source of risk. At the same time, valuing the continuity of original forms has allowed for the reproduction of eccentric esthetical forms, understood as typical of local *kultura* and, therefore, distinctive and authentic. These aspects of the local

29. In this case, color comes not from paint but from burning and smoking statues in the kitchen. This technique adds three extra days to the production process but is justified based on its authenticity.

context facilitate the transformation of statues into commodities, so it was not necessary for Empreza Di'ak to intervene more extensively in the production dynamics in Makili.

Another important factor bolstering the meaning and value of statues in the tourism market was their increasing popularity due to the intervention of researchers from Charles Darwin University (CDU), Timor-Leste's Secretariat of Arts and Culture, and the NGO.[30] In 2017, several such statues were exhibited in the CDU's art gallery in Darwin, Australia.[31] Although this specific discussion is outside the considerations of this chapter, it must be noted that these actors have been central to the commodification of such artifacts.[32]

In contrast, the contemporary production of sanan rai in Arlo stems from a very different historical background. Galipaud and Assis (2014), and some of our interlocutors' reports, indicate that most women in the community used to produce pottery, and it was highly valued for domestic use and exchange in barter networks. People traded pottery for tools produced in other villages, objects for marriage exchanges, funerals and even for land.

As time went by, however, multiple processes intervened in changing pottery production. The arrival of iron, aluminum and plastic items for cooking and storing food reduced the use value of pottery and, as a consequence, its exchange value. According to Empreza Di'ak, pottery production has also been devalued by the younger generation of Arlo women, who see no prestige in the craft. This process has accompanied the diffusion and formalization of public education in Timor-Leste. School attendance became more important than acquiring practical pottery-making knowledge.

Perhaps the conversion of Arlo residents to Protestantism also had some impact on local knowledge of sanan rai production. In his discussion of the modus operandi of Protestant conversion in

30. Available at https://cdu.edu.au/artcollection-gallery/sculptures-atauro-island-public-programs Last accessed June 18, 2018.

31. A catalogue by Joanna Barrkman entitled, *The Scupltures of Atauro Island*, was also published for the exhibition in 2017.

32. For an analysis of the processes involved in the transformation of certain artifacts into art and/or national symbols, see Silva and Sousa (2015), and Silva and Ferreira (2016).

the region, Keane (2007) reveals that Protestant denominations were significantly less tolerant than the Catholic Church to the persistence of local cults, knowledge and rites among those who declared they had converted to Christianity. Protestant practice required followers to abandon local knowledge and their underlying cosmologies. A fundamental issue for many Protestant denominations has been the suppression of material and human mediations between men and God.

Galipaud and Assis (2014) suggests that pottery, like weaving in other contexts, was generally classified as female knowledge, and associated with fertility and the reproduction of life among many Timorese groups. In this context, we may suppose that knowledge involved in its elaboration was also considered to be sacred and bequeathed by the ancestors, similar to the narratives on statue smoking techniques in Makili. People may also have experienced pottery production as a way of connecting with mystical forces, and a means for securing fertility and reproduction of the world.

The disenchantment of material mediators connecting people to the mystical world has structured Protestant missionary practices in eastern Indonesia. This raises the following questions: did local adherence to Protestant Christianity have an impact on the devaluation and virtual extinction of certain kinds of local knowledge? How has the disenchantment that comes with conversion to Christianity conditioned their management during nation-building processes?

Finally, it is important to underscore the differential contact between the Makili and the Arlo village with Dili, and with the market exchange regime that is hegemonic in the capital. As Makili residents have had direct access to the sea and practice artisanal fishing for commerce, their contact with Dili and its associated market-mediated exchanges has been quite frequent. By contrast, Arlo villagers' contact with Dili seems much less frequent, also an effect of its geographical location. This is an important reason why the ED pedagogic practices in Arlo have been more intensive and extensive than in Makili.

Closing Remarks

This chapter offered an analysis of some of the procedures involved in commodity production in the suku Makili and in the village of Arlo in Atauro, as a response to practices of governance implemented by ED. Inspired by Kopytoff (2008) and Tsing (2013), we assume that commodity production is a material and symbolic process, whereby recognizing an artifact as a commodity involves its submission to particular managerial practices.

Empreza Di'ak and other institutions have encouraged the formation of production groups as a key governance tactic aimed at strengthening their pedagogic work with local communities. Through production groups, specific ways of relating people and things are collectively disseminated. This may bolster the collective restructuring of multiple kinds of practices.

Another important ED strategy for inducing the production of artifacts as potential commodities has been guaranteed purchasing. The transfer of cash to production groups or artisans in exchange for baskets, statues and other objects has been a critical event for stabilizing their identities as commodities. In these exchanges, there is an implicit rule − once the object is sold to ED, artisans relinquish any property rights over them. However, purchasing in itself does not seem to be enough for consolidating their status as commodities. Processes for classifying, selecting and coding the artifacts are also essential, as Tsing (2013) remarked in reference to the matsutake mushroom.

Tables in Excel spreadsheets orienting the identification and attribution of monetary value to the artifacts operate as fundamental mediators in the process of selection, classification and codification of objects. Tables thus become matrices generative of classificatory systems for managing the objects as commodities. The commodities thus exist for ED exclusively as the codes that are attributed to them.

There are, however, significant differences in how ED interacts with production groups in Arlo and in Makili. As discussed, in Makili the interaction between ED staff and members of local production groups seemed to be quicker. The visits consisted largely of identifying, classifying, purchasing the objects and

recording them in spreadsheets. In Makili, there were other production groups besides those working with ED, which existed before the organization began its work in the suku. The members of Makili production groups seemed familiar with the creation of artifacts to be distributed as commodities. They also introduced innovations in form more spontaneously, to diversify the objects and boost sales.

We suggest that these particularities result from a combination of different factors: 1. The vitality of local knowledge related to the production of religiously valued artifacts, among which are the statues; 2. From a long-term perspective, such vitality may be an effect of missionary practices particular to the Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, which recommended respect towards local cultures and their strategic deployment for introducing Christian cosmologies (Silva 2018a). In other words, we are suggesting that conversion tactics adopted by Catholic Church agents in Makili may have led to the valuing of local institutions and artifacts, such as the statues, which are today exploited and coveted as commodities by multiple actors; 3. More intense connections between Makili and the capital city of Dili, where a market regime prevails.

In Arlo, on the other hand, Empreza Di'ak itself has played a leading role in commodity production, particularly when compared with its scope of action in Makili. Firstly, there is the recognition and salvaging of local pottery knowledge first promoted by the organization itself, along with the Secretariat of Arts and Culture, and IRD. The Hakusara production group was itself a product of the organization's work in the community. Before the NGO's arrival, there were no production groups in Arlo that made artifacts for external consumption. These effects have been predicated on intensive work by ED staff with sections of the Arlo population: meetings with these production groups take longer, pedagogic practices targeting quality control are more detailed, and so forth. ED's purchasing of pottery that is not wholly suitable for consumers is further evidence of the centrality of its operations in Arlo. What we call the market presents itself to Arlo potters through Empreza Di'ak.

From another perspective, one could argue that ED's leading role in Arlo results, at least in part, from the trajectory of local pottery knowledge. If, in order to produce such pottery, it was first necessary to rescue the underlying knowledge that made it possible, we must ask why the skills almost became extinct. As suggested in the fourth section, its gradual disappearance had many drivers. The introduction of iron, aluminum and plastic objects was one of them. Analyses of Christian conversion tactics in eastern Indonesia (Keane 2007) offer other elements for rendering the picture more complex. In comparison with conversion strategies adopted by Catholic missionaries in the region, requirements imposed by Protestant denominations on local populations for recognizing them as Christians were many and very rigid. People had to abandon all local practices and knowledge resembling pre-Christian cosmologies. As was remarked, pottery as well as weaving evoked the management of fertility and of the continuity of life. Ultimately, people believed fertility was a gift bestowed by the ancestors on the living. Against this background, it is possible that pottery may have been somehow subjected to control and attack by Protestant missionaries operating in Atauro. This may have contributed to the virtual extinction of this kind of knowledge in Arlo and elsewhere.

Moreover, we are not dealing here with processes whereby these populations have been entangled in the capitalist mode of production. Our focus was narrowly placed on the creation of commodities, and this may happen either outside or beyond capitalism as a means of production. It was impossible to avoid, however, a reflection on the possible implications of governance practices discussed here.

Guaranteed purchase of artifacts from production groups in Atauro (and elsewhere) by ED (and other actors) may encourage locals to invest more time in their elaboration. As a consequence, they may channel less energy into the production of food and practices of reciprocal care. With time, a synergy between these processes may arise and, together with other processes, such as alienation from land, they will certainly contribute to intensifying these populations' dependence on monetized resources (money) and on the market for their social reproduction. Therefore, the ED

practices analyzed here may be understood as part of a broader historical plot where the networks of interdependence through which people reproduce themselves are being displaced.

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